



NSF's Comet ISON Photo Contest

Participants' Guide

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DESCRIPTION

Who: Amateur and professional photographers
What: Stunning images of Comet ISON
Where: Our online platform, ISON.skild.com, where you can register and submit your photos
When: October 15, 2013, through January 15, 2014
Why: To capture stunning images of Comet ISON, predicted to be one of the brightest comets in the night sky in decades

PRIZE INFORMATION

The contest winners will be awarded cash prizes. First Place prizes will be awarded per category. One People's Choice prize will be made. The prizes will be awarded as checks made out to the registered team leader and may be shared among any team members listed on the registration form at the team leader's direction.

Cameras & Tripods (no tracking)

First Prize: \$2,500
Second Prize: \$1,000

Piggyback Cameras (with tracking)

First Prize: \$2,500
Second Prize: \$1,000

Through the Scope

First Prize: \$2,500
Second Prize: \$1,000

People's Choice \$1,500
(Public selection of best image overall)

Winners will be notified of the official contest results before the public announcement is made in April 2014 by news release. If the winners cannot be reached on time, the news release will proceed without further notification. NSF will publish the names of the winners on its website, and the winning images will also appear in *Astronomy* magazine, on *Astronomy's* website, and on *Discover* magazine's website.

CATEGORIES

Cameras and Tripods (no tracking)

Pictures taken with cameras and normal camera lenses only (no telescopes), using a tripod or otherwise acquired without the aid of any tracking devices.

Piggyback Cameras (with tracking)

Pictures taken with cameras and normal camera lenses only (no telescopes), using any form of tracking device.

Through the Scope

Pictures taken through a telescope using a camera, CCD, or other imaging device.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Entries must convey a visual of Comet ISON.
- Entries must include information about where the visual was taken, when the visual was taken (day, month, year, and time), the equipment used to capture the visual, and the camera settings.
- Entries can be produced by individuals or teams.
- A maximum of three entries by an individual or team is permitted.
- Each entry can be submitted to one category only.
- Entries must match the description of the category to which they are submitted.
- Entries must not advertise or promote a commercial product visually or orally.
- Entries and registrant information must be submitted in English.
- Entries that reach the semifinal judging round must have a high-resolution version of the visual that is at least 2 megapixels, in order to ensure that the image can be reproduced for publication and promotional purposes.
- Employees, contractors, or officers of the sponsoring organizations are not eligible to enter the contest.
- Judges are not eligible to enter the contest.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Visual Impact

A successful entry is visually striking.

Technical Skill

A successful entry includes typical astrophotography criteria which, depending on the type of imaging employed, may include: Focus, dynamic range, tracking accuracy, appropriate exposure, etc.

Originality/Creativity

A successful entry uses unique settings or methods to present/display the image. It has an individual vitality and energy and creates a novel presentation.

JUDGING ROUNDS

Preliminary

- Qualifying entries (those that meet eligibility criteria and abide by all competition rules) are scored by a panel of judges, consisting of scientists, engineers, astrophotographers, and other professionals from NSF.
- All entries are scored anonymously.

Semifinal

- Entries scored in the top half of each category in the preliminary round advance to the semifinal round.
- Entries are scored by a panel of judges, consisting of scientists, engineers, astrophotographers, and other professionals from NSF and *Astronomy* magazine.
- All entries are scored anonymously.

Final

- The top 10% or top 30 entries (whichever is smaller) of each category from the semifinal round advance to the final round.
- Entries that reach the final round are eligible to win the People's Choice award via an online public vote.
- Entries are scored by a panel of distinguished judges, composed of prominent astronomers and scientific visualization artists, who are chosen jointly by NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine.
- Each entry is scored by all of the final-round judges.
- All entries are scored anonymously.
- Judges, at their discretion, may choose not to award First or Second prize in a category, but may instead choose to award Honorable Mentions or choose not to award a prize at all.
- All judges' decisions are final.

- Winners will be notified individually before the public announcement of the official contest results. Failure to reach winners will not delay the public announcement. Contest results will be publicly announced in *Astronomy* magazine, on *Astronomy's* website, on *Discover* magazine's website, and by a joint news release with NSF. NSF will also publish the names of winners on its website. By participating in this contest, you give implicit permission to NSF, *Astronomy* magazine and *Discover* magazine to publish your names and images of Comet ISON.
- Entire contest is subject to cancellation should the visibility of the comet be judged not optimal by scientific staff at NSF, *Astronomy* magazine and *Discover* magazine.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Q: I have some media produced on an SGI workstation. Is that OK to submit?

A: Not if we need an SGI workstation to view it. Unless otherwise noted, we do not accept entries unless they can be reviewed in a PC environment.

2. Q: May I submit Photoshop or QuarkXPress Files?

A: No. Please submit your images using a TIFF, JPG, BMP, or PNG extension.

3. Q: May I submit Camera Raw format images?

A: No.

4. Q: Is PowerPoint OK?

A: No.

5. Q: What can I submit? What kind of things would be appropriate?

A: Please review our Eligibility Criteria and Rules pages for specific information. We encourage you to submit your entry!

6. Q: What characterizes a winning entry?

A: Entries are scored based on visual impact, technical skill, and originality/creativity. See our Judging Criteria page for more information.

7. Q: I am from a foreign country. Can I submit an entry?

A: Yes, this is an international competition.

8. Q: What needs to be submitted in English?

A: The application and all documents related to the contest must be written in English.

9. Q: What are the file size restrictions for my entry?

A: Images submitted for *judging* may not exceed 10 MB. An original version of at least 2 megapixels must be available for *winning* entries, and *winning* entries may exceed 10 MB in original size.

10. Q: How do I submit my entries?

A: Entries are submitted via the online platform, ISON.skild.com.

11. Q: May I digitally alter my image?

A: We recognize that astrophotographs typically require considerably more processing than regular photography to achieve desired results. However, please do not enhance or alter your photographs beyond that which is reasonably necessary. For example, cutting and pasting foreground elements into your image is not appropriate. We require all processing steps to be summarized when submitting your entry and these will be taken into account during judging.

12. Q: Am I required to disclose my processing steps when submitting an entry?

A: Yes. The judges need to know to what extent the original image has been altered. As an example, the following basic description is acceptable: "The contrast has been stretched and the color balance has been modified." A more complicated image could be described by: "Four individual 5-minute exposures have been registered and added. The resulting image was contrast enhanced and color balanced. An image of the comet obtained the previous day and processed in a similar fashion has been cut and pasted into this image, to demonstrate the changes in the comet's structure over a 24 hour period."

RULES

- Contest entry constitutes agreement to adhere to the rules and stipulations set forth by the contest sponsors.
- Any entrant or entry found in violation of any rule will be disqualified.
- Each entrant certifies, through submission to the contest, that the entry is his or her own original creative work and does not violate or infringe the creative work of others, as protected under copyright law.
- By entering the contest, the entrant agrees to hold harmless NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine for all legal and administrative claims, to include associated expenses that may arise from any claims related to his or her submission or its use.
- Entrants retain all copyright and equivalent rights but give NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine nonexclusive rights to use their names, likenesses, quotes, submissions, or any part of the submissions for educational publicity and/or promotional purposes. This includes but is not limited to website display, print materials, and exhibits.

- NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine reserve the right to use semifinalist and finalist winners' names and entries for educational publicity and/or promotional purposes, including website or exhibition of winning entries. It is understood that entries will be shared with reporters covering these awards and for promotion of the competition itself.
- NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine will not be responsible for any claims or complaints from third parties about any disputes of ownership regarding the images.
- Winners are responsible for all taxes or other fees connected with the prize received and/or travel paid for by the sponsoring organizations.
- NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine will not respond to any claims or inquiries regarding contest rules.
- NSF, *Astronomy* magazine, and *Discover* magazine have the final say on any point not outlined in the entry rules.
- Information requested on the entry form will be used to determine how and if the competition is meeting its goals, purposes, and audience. Submission of this information is also necessary to contact entrants.
- Employees, contractors, officers, or judges of the sponsoring organizations are not eligible to enter the competition.
- Finalist judges, either individually or as part of a team, are not eligible to enter the competition.
- If the visibility of the Comet ISON is judged non optimal, the sponsoring organizations reserve the right to modify or cancel the competition at any time during the duration of the competition.
- If an insufficient number of qualified entries are received, the sponsoring organizations reserve the right to modify or cancel the competition at any time during the duration of the competition.
- Should NSF decide to bring winning contestants to Washington, D.C., or to any other location for promotional and other purposes, expenses paid by NSF will be within the limits set forth in law according to federal travel regulations. The travel will be restricted to participants based in the US. Foreign winners will have to designate a US-based representative for that purpose.
- Should NSF decide to bring winning contestants to Washington, D.C., or to any other location for promotional and other purposes, NSF will fund travel for only one person from the U.S. per group or team entry if the entry wins. The maximum funding is \$1,000 for one person per group or team entry. This person will be the contact person listed on the entry form. If this person is not available, he or she will designate a replacement from the team. If a single person wins multiple categories, he or she must represent all of the winning entries; designees are not permitted in this instance. Only persons listed on the original entry form may have their travel funded by NSF. All other persons accompanying the winner/group representative must arrange and fund their own travel and accommodations.
- All contestants agree that they, their heirs and estates shall hold harmless the United States, the employees of the federal government, and all employees of NSF, *Astronomy*

magazine, and *Discover* magazine for any and all injuries and/or claims arising from participation in this contest, to include that which may occur while traveling to or participating in contest activities.

- A lead contact person must be designated for team submissions. The order in which names are listed on the entry form is the order that names will appear in *Astronomy* magazine, *Discover* magazine, and on the NSF website.